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# Online learning programmes for less widely used and taught languages

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## Abstract

Romanian language has been included in various projects dealing with LWULT (Less Widely Used and Taught Languages), alongside with other languages such as Latvian, Gaelic, Basque or Turkish. Such projects promote and disseminate tools and methods which make it easier to deal with understanding these languages especially in vocational contexts. Open online programmes, copy left teaching material and teaching methods such as the CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) Method and eTandem Method, as well as further theoretical information are available and ready to be used for in-service courses. Since these kinds of programmes have proven a successful method of teaching and learning foreign widely used and taught languages, they are also a useful and encouraging way of learning LWUTL languages for vocational purposes mainly. That is why the programmes available online for such purposes have different difficulty levels and topics for reading, writing, listening or speaking, as they aim to be a supportive aid for learners of all ages involved in long life learning programmes.

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understanding these languages especially in vocational contexts. Open online programmes, copy left electronic teaching material and teaching methods, as well as further theoretical information are available and ready to be used for in-service courses. Since these kinds of programmes have proven a successful method for teaching and learning foreign widely used and taught languages, they are also a useful and encouraging way of learning LWUTL languages for vocational purposes mainly. That is why the programmes available online for such purposes have different difficulty levels and topics for reading, writing, listening or speaking, as they aim to be a supportive aid for learners of all ages involved in Long Life Learning programmes.

If some of the projects promoting open online educational programmes have as a target group teachers of the LWUTL in vocational colleges due to the fact that a European survey showed that the teachers of less taught languages have little pedagogical and methodological training and the course materials for these languages were rarely communicative in nature, the dedicated websites can prove a very useful and at hand resource of materials for every learner who wishes to exploit the advantages of eLearning, to develop, test and disseminate knowledge thus acquired. Such educational programmes can be available online, and some of them are copy left and thus give the possibility to be widely used and adapted for each purpose in language skills. The results experienced when using such programmes are remarkable with students of all ages.

The teaching methods and the learning techniques are based on and related to electronic and online resources and materials, thus being attractive for being cost-effective, and easy to access for being free of charge. One successful approach is moving the classroom after the classes over at the comfort of one's own room, where teacher-student or trainer-learner, student-student or learner-learner interaction continues. It is the case of educational weblogs, considered the new learning space. A virtual service can become an educational service which can provide students the opportunity to work and solve the tasks given by the teacher at their own pace (to some degree), to enjoy communication with the teacher and peers on an entirely different level, to learn the value of collaboration and to benefit from increased interaction and exposure to new ideas.

In the new virtual learning environment and internet-based materials and tools for teachers and students, the trends are also changing and adapting to the educational progress and learning process development, so that the channels through which information travels, the guiding lines, the evaluation process and the teaching techniques are getting better, are user-friendly and user-adapted; everything is changing, adapting, evolving and improving based on continuous interaction and exchange of information and resources. Such an e-solution proved to have delivered results consistently and effectively, because students come to own the foreign language by learning naturally, without repetitive translation or monotonous drills, engage interactively with a variety of activities, being able to create their own motivating scenarios, speak confidently and develop conversational abilities upon on-the-spot topics, have fun too and experience a satisfactory activity.

With the interactive and electronic teaching techniques at hand learners get instant feedback, thus becoming more motivated, as they have some features that reinforce long-term memory by allowing them to review personal progress. The programmes that use freely these electronic techniques offer a series of carefully designed, engaging activities, adapted to all different difficulty levels and with topics for reading, writing, listening or speaking, that can make a learner fully motivated and aware of a real sense of achievement and real progress throughout the process of language acquirement. The websites that host such free open online teaching programmes are also a useful resource for teachers as they also offer free course books with description of language teaching, e-learning materials and methodologies, or flexible competence based language teacher course modules on ICT methodologies and development of ICT

based teaching resources. Active learner environments offer better results but they are harder to manage than lecture oriented approaches. Nevertheless, some useful methods of interactive learning as well as some innovative and available for free ways of exchanging information and knowledge have certain advantages when it comes to confronting the two ways of learning: the traditional or classical learning approach and the new learning orientation.

Computer Assisted Language Learning has recently become a very useful, modern and at hand teaching method, its emphasis being placed upon communication and task-based learning activities. But how do we use CALL in teaching Less Widely Used and Taught Languages? The main component of learning a new language is the cognitive one, the entire learning process representing the result of the student's own processing work of the input from a given language. So, the starting point shouldn't focus on the students sitting in front of a computer trying to learn a foreign language, but this point should be a part of a process, in which students sometimes make use of the computers. A precisely engineered series of activities which encourage constant interaction, allow students and learners of all ages to improve their speaking ability through communication, to achieve confident progression from simple grammar exercises to complex language projects.

While experiencing and enjoying a new language by discovering it with the help of e-resources and e-tools, the immediate feedback and motivation encourage learners to actively engage in the learning process. Students will use technology tools to enhance learning, increase productivity and promote creativity. For example, students use productivity tools (such as the application **Quandary, Hot Potatoes**) to collaborate in constructing technology-enhanced models, prepare projects and produce other creative works, or they use communication tools (a variety of media and formats such as **on-line chats, e-Tandem, Multi User Dungeons, Simulations**) to communicate information and ideas effectively, to collaborate and interact with peers, experts and other audiences. Another example is VISL or Visual Interactive Syntax Learning is a grammar programme, a result of a research and development project, which refers to less widely used and taught languages. It represents a good educational support for different languages, focusing on grammar exercises. For each language there are available different options and grammar tools.

The researchers who developed this project are continually adding new internet-based grammar tools and applications for education and research. For example, some newly added languages are Russian, Romanian, Faroese, Estonian and Icelandic. For the moment for all these languages only a few options, such as the **pre – analyzed** and **games** options are available, but newer and newer instruments and tools are added on the site [www.visl.sdu.dk](http://www.visl.sdu.dk). All the web based didactic approaches focus on the actual challenges and changes in teaching foreign languages. For example, the **CLIL** (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology is a method where language is used to learn as well as to communicate; a successful CLIL lesson should combine all language skills, and should also focus on the 4 Cs – content, communication, cognition, culture. **Wordlink** is web-based facility which links webpages automatically, word by word with online dictionaries, and it is the result of a European funded project which develops web tools for teaching languages and offers e-materials for less widely taught and used languages, especially for vocational content. It works in conjunction with **MultiDict**, a multiple dictionary lookup facility, which allows easy switch between dictionaries in many languages, both being the basis of **CLILSTORE**, a store of copyleft content and language integrated teaching material - also the result of the same European funded project. The **Mobile Learning** methodology focuses on the mobility of the students, interacting with portable devices, as well as on the mobility of the teacher. It includes creation of learning material "on the spot, in the field", using predominantly phones with special software. The **Task Based Learning (TBL) methodology** is a student-centered technique, and, as its name shows, it is based on language learning by using working tasks, with the purpose of offering the class spontaneity,

individuality and also vivacity. Each student will come into contact with the tasks and with the other students, as well. The purpose is for each student to follow an internalized process of individual learning. The teacher's mission is to offer the didactic material, the working tasks, and to create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in class.

Some freeware programmes allow teachers to make webpages with video graphics and texts where all words are linked to online dictionaries. Once created the exercises they can be delivered in the form of web pages using a free web service called dropbox. Such are the softwares **Texttoys**, a shareware and **TextBlender**, a freeware. The webpages thus created contain interactive language-learning exercises. These softwares can link to further CALL exercises, for example produced using the free software **Hot Potatoes** which includes some applications, enabling the creation of interactive multiple choice exercises with the programme called **J-Quiz**, jumbled – sentences with the programme called **J-Mix**, crossword applications with the programme called **J-Cross**, matching exercises with the programme called **J-Match** and gap-fill exercises with the programme **J-Cloze**, all for the World Wide Web.

Some advantages for these free websites that offer open online learning programmes and provide modern virtual learning systems are the numerous types of activities and tasks that can be used and combined to develop communication and imagination, rendering a numberless of possibilities to create and develop learning units, while some disadvantages are that individual learners who want to try any of the methods above described making use of the e-tools and e-materials, ready-to-use or on-the-spot created, have to master some basic computer skills as well as the intermediary language, which is usually English. This is not a problem if the learning process is guided by a trained teacher.

The teacher of languages must know the different approaches to learning in order to select the most appropriate instructional strategies. Learning strategies should be selected to motivate learners, facilitate deep processing, cater for individual differences, promote meaningful learning, encourage interaction, provide feedback, facilitate contextual learning, and provide support during the learning process. Some webpages host free resources, materials and methodologies for language learning, and especially for LWUTL, promoting the world wide web free access for an active learner classroom, for a new trend that takes into account the fact that the term student faces a new challenge: the “non-traditional” student, whose educational background, interests, perspectives and capabilities are totally different than the traditional eighteen-year-old high school graduate. With different learning styles, both type of students can benefit from the consistent support of pedagogical approaches, by being actively and responsibly engaged in the e-learning process, thus getting immediate feedback and becoming more motivated and aware of a sense of satisfaction and improvement.

Successful lessons are those which suit the students needs, on a basis of communicational and educational approach, since these modern learning strategies have or should have as a primary goal to increase the personal contact between students and faculty on academic issues. This kind of learning environment can be tailored to individualized instruction, the personal results, both attitudinal and cognitive, will prove the students that they have played a major part in the endeavour, and continuous interaction and engagement in the web assignments and activities will encourage them to improve and enhance their learning.

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